

Personal Tool – Keeping Mentally Healthy

Mental Health Awareness Month started on October 1st. This is unlike any other time in the year that we might experience like holiday or festive seasons. There are no cues when we are shopping (online or otherwise) like songs, advertisements with holly attached to them or a planned lunch that rounds up the season with often a large grocery bill, familial stress or even gifts given to commemorate it.

Mental Health Awareness Month, therefore, does not mean that mental health is ignored the other months of the year – but rather that as humans it is an excuse to watch documentaries, shows and stories that highlight the impact of mental ill-health. It is a time when we broaden our knowledge, experience and even empathy towards those that have the courage to express their symptoms. Overall, mental health awareness is attending to (rather than dismissing or minimising) in ourselves our feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Similarly, listening and taking in what others are saying and the way that others are expressing their needs and wants. Asking more questions and gathering information as it comes is just as important as looking at and thinking about what others are not saying. But mostly it is an awareness of our own and the health of others. Awareness is not being an expert, and similarly, it does not mean giving world-class counselling to our family and friends – but it does mean joining the dots of signs and symptoms to mental ill-health.

The signs and symptoms of mental health are complicated, and those who are concerned should look at our login area [resources](#) that are specific to anxiety and depression (the most common mental health conditions). Also, this document is an awareness piece, and those who are concerned should speak to their own mental health professional or book themselves for an individual EAP session by calling **1800 818 728**.

Many clients of AccessEAP ask what the best tips are to gain and maintain good mental health. Reviewing all the literature on our and many other websites, these are still the best:

- **Get enough sleep.** If this is a new or an ongoing issue for you, take the time to speak to a professional in this area. There are strategies, ideas and practices that can assist (for example, sleep hygiene and stress management) to create good sleep.
- **Get enough sunlight.** During the day, whether you are working at home or still in the workplace, make time to see the sun. It improves mood, concentration and helps to starve off depression.
- **Reduce alcohol, smoking and other drugs.** Alcohol and other drug use can often be a self-medicating strategy that can increase without many people realising it. Cigarette smoking can create more irritability as more and more time between cigarettes creates withdrawal which can lead to irritability.
- **Manage stress** – be it work, personal, familial, relational, financial, or home-related-name it and get on top of it. Stress management can be as elegant as planning or as broad as meditating, exercising, or counselling. All work.



- **Get active!** Do not just try something once and declare it a failure; try again. Look at activities that you can do in and around the home (gardening and walking with a neighbour) as well as using Zoom to play bridge with a cousin overseas. Teaching the mind new tricks gives confidence and helps to maintain mental health.
- **Find an activity that you like,** that is fun and enjoyable. Perhaps with 2020 being a quiet year, use the time to fine-tune a skill (like a language, instrument, or creative pursuit) that makes you smile.
- **Connect, connect, and connect.** Being sociable (in a COVID safe way) helps to reduce worries, stressors, and challenges.
- **Help someone else** with either a skill that you have or with your physical strength. When feeling a part of a community, often our sense of loneliness decreases. Loneliness kills more people than cancer, so this connecting is a great way to keep mental health strong.
- **Ask for help.** At AccessEAP we are, just like other supports around you, here to support, guide, listen and talk about what is happening for you. Ring, text, email or jump on our website for further support.

Remember, as your EAP, we are here to support you whatever the nature of your concerns. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

